

Become A Special Educator In Tennessee

Feature Story

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I consider myself a wealthy and fortunate man because of my life's journey. I have a wonderful wife, Janie, and we've been married for 34 years. We have two children of whom the oldest is our son, Chris, who has a Doctorate in Physical Therapy. We also have a daughter, Laura, who has a Masters of Arts in Education and is employed as a kindergarten teacher. My family shares a strong faith in God, and we have all been fortunate to be able to discern God's will for our lives. Teaching children with profound disabilities has become my second career and my calling through that discernment.

I closed a previously owned graphic design and printing company that I started in 1979 and sought my new calling only to discover the BASE TN (Become A Special Educator in Tennessee) Program and a host of highly qualified professors at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). Returning to college at 51 years old was challenging and uplifting. I knew that even though I had never taught, I would be well prepared by MTSU.

While attending Stratford High School in Nashville, Tennessee, my class went on a field trip to Clover Bottom Developmental Center. There I saw teenage students in an educational setting that I did not understand since it was so different from my public school experiences. I reflected: Prior to 1975, children who had disabilities were not allowed to attend public schools. For example, I never saw students in wheel chairs. This event resurfaced in my life when I decided to become a special educator in 2005 at the age of 51. At that time I applied for and was accepted as a student to be supported by BASE-TN. This program provided funding for my tuition. In exchange, I agreed to fulfill a service obligation to the state of Tennessee which consisted of teaching in a special education public classroom two years for each 30 semester hours of BASE-TN support.

Currently, I'm completing my third year as a special educator, teaching children with profound and severe disabilities in the Wilson County School System, a public system located in Middle Tennessee. I go to work every day happy and ready to be fulfilled. That feeling is priceless. BASE-TN, a Tennessee Department of Education Program, was a critical link in making this happen!